

Domestic Violence 101: Defining Domestic Violence

Myths and Facts about Domestic Violence

- MYTH: Domestic Violence is rare.
- FACT: The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control now estimates that almost 1.5 million women a year are victims of rape and physical assaults by boyfriends and husbands each year, and about one in four women is likely to be abused by a partner in her lifetime.
(Tjaden and Thoennes N. Full Report of the Prevalence, Incidence and Consequences of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women, Washington (DC): NIJ; 2000.)
- MYTH: Domestic Violence is not a serious problem in the U.S.
- FACT: Battering is the single largest cause of injury to women in the United States – over mugging, automobile accidents and rape, combined.
(NCADV 2003)
- MYTH: Battered women are masochistic.
- FACT: This places the burden of guilt for being beaten on the women, so the violent behavior of the male has been perpetuated. This myth would have us believe that women experience pleasure akin to sexual stimulation as a result of being beaten by the man she loves.
- MYTH: Domestic Violence is not a common occurrence.
- FACT: Every 12 seconds, a woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend.
(American Institute on Domestic Violence 2003)
- MYTH: Pregnant women are not victims of domestic violence.
- FACT: As many as 324,000 women each year experience intimate partner violence during their pregnancy.
(Violence and reproductive health; current knowledge and future research directions. Maternal and Child Health Journal 2000; 4(2): 79-84).
- MYTH: Battered women are crazy if they choose to stay in abusive relationships.
- FACT: Many battered women do not exhibit behaviors that, to those of us outside the intimate relationship, may seem unusual or even bizarre. It is important to remember that, as an outsider to the abusive relationship, we are not living with the daily threat and fear of abuse or death. These women are. What appear to be bizarre behaviors to us are often survival strategies women use to keep themselves safe.
- MYTH: Middle-class women do not get battered as frequently or as violently as poor women.
- FACT: Domestic violence occurs in all socio-economic groups.
- MYTH: People who are religious do not batter and are not victims of battering.
- FACT: Batterers can be religious people, including church leaders. Many battered women have deep religious beliefs which may encourage them to keep the family together at all costs.
- MYTH: Batterers are violent in all their relationships.



- **FACT:** Most batterers do not use violence at the workplace or in other non-intimate relationships to resolve conflict. “Batterer’s typically present a different personality outside the home than they do inside, which complicates a woman’s ability to describe her experiences to people outside the relationship.”
(*K.J. Wilson, Ed.D., When Violence Begins at Home, 1997.*)
- **MYTH:** When batterers are violent, it is because they “lost their temper,” and not because they meant to hurt their partner.
- **FACT:** Batterers use violence because it works, and not because they lose control of their emotions.
- **MYTH:** Drinking and/or drug abuse cause battering.
- **FACT:** There seems to be a correlation between alcohol and battering. Although alcohol abuse may increase the likelihood of violent behavior, it does not cause or excuse it.
- **MYTH:** Domestic violence only affects the adults in the household.
- **FACT:** According to a recent American Bar Association report, experts estimate that between 3.3 and 10 million children witness domestic violence annually. The report cites numerous links between serious emotional and psychological problems from exposure to domestic violence:
 - Depression, hopelessness, and other forms of emotional distress in teenagers are strongly associated with exposure to domestic violence.
 - Infants often fail to thrive.
 - Children may exhibit bed wetting, sleep disorders, violence towards other children, stuttering, and crying.
 - Children exposed to domestic violence have a tendency to identify with the aggressor and to lose respect for the victim; men who witness their fathers abuse their mothers are three times more likely to abuse their wives than men who have not witnessed abuse. A woman who witnesses her father abuse her mother has a much greater likelihood of becoming a battered woman herself.
(*“The Impact of Domestic Violence on Children,” American Bar Association 1995.*)
- **MYTH:** Battered women grew up in abusive families.
- **FACT:** Many women who find themselves in abusive relationships did not grow up in violent households. Often these women come from gentle, loving families. What tends to be the standard, however, is that their families were traditionalist with a strongly held belief in prescribed feminine sexual stereotypes.
- **MYTH:** Battered women have done something to cause the battering.
- **FACT:** Another “victim blaming” statement, this myth places responsibility for the batterer’s behavior squarely on the women’s shoulders. Most battered women spend inordinate amounts of energy trying to placate and please their abusive partners. The reality of the situation is that no one else, including the women, is responsible for the abusive partners behavior.
- **MYTH:** Battered women are uneducated.
- **FACT:** The education level of women who are battered ranges from fifth grade through completion of professional and doctoral degrees.
- **MYTH:** Batterer’s are unsuccessful and lack resources to cope with the world.
- **FACT:** Batterer’s cover as wide a spectrum as their victims with regard to levels of education and professional status.
- **MYTH:** Batterers will stop the violence when they get married.
- **FACT:** A batterer’s suspicions and possessiveness increase after marriage. His attacks also become



more frequent and severe.

- MYTH: The batterer is not a loving partner.
- FACT: The batterer does not always batter; many have period when they can be very generous with their affection. The woman has seen this and knows that her partner is capable of being loving to her. If she could only get him to change and maintain this loving side on a constant basis, she may reason, their relationship would be better. Unfortunately, this is a setup for her; the batterer will choose or choose not to batter her, regardless of her actions.

- MYTH: Once a batterer, always a batterer.
- FACT: The key to changing an abusive relationship is the batterer's willingness to accept responsibility for his actions. If the batterer admits to the inappropriateness of his actions, wants to change, and seek counseling, then he has a chance to recover.

- MYTH: Domestic violence is usually a one-time event, an isolated incident.
- FACT: About 1 in 5 women victimized by their partners reported that they had been the victim of similar crimes by the same man. They had sustained at least 3 assaults within 6 months and the assaults were so similar they could not remember them distinctly.

- MYTH: There is no correlation between animal abuse and domestic violence.
- FACT: Domestic violence as well as serial and mass criminal violence often involves animals. For families suffering with domestic violence or abuse, the use or threat of abuse against companion animals is often used for leverage by the controlling/violent member of the family to keep others in line or silent. It is estimated that 88% of pets living in households with domestic abuse are either abused or killed. Of all the women who enter shelters to escape abuse, 57% have had a pet killed by their abuser.

("The Link between Animal Abuse and Domestic Violence," American Animal Hospital Association, 2003)

- MYTH: All Immigrant Women are:
 - Undocumented
 - Poor
 - People of Color
 - Heterosexual
 - Have many children
 - Cannot survive economically if undocumented
 - Do not want to or will not use the legal system
 - Have immigrant status which cannot change
 - Come only from certain countries
- FACT: In the United States today, women and children constitute approximately two-thirds of all legal immigrants. Immigrant women suffer a triple burden of discrimination based on their sex, race, and immigration status. In creasing evidence indicates that there area large number of immigrant women trapped and isolated in violent relationships, afraid to turn to anyone for help.

Hitting and Battering are Not the Same Thing

- Battering is a pattern of violent coercive behavior and threats that is intended to control another person's thoughts and conduct. The abuse can be emotional, psychological, physical, and/or sexual.
- Domestic Violence is a learned and culturally reinforced pattern of behavior, that, without intervention, becomes more destructive over time.



What is Domestic Violence?

- Domestic violence is a pattern of violent and coercive tactics
- Domestic violence is committed by one intimate against another
- Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling behavior that consists of physical, sexual and/or psychological abuse or assaults
- Domestic violence is a learned pattern of behavior
- Domestic violence perpetrators seek to control the thoughts, beliefs and conduct of their partner
- The abuser will punish their partner for resisting their control
- While domestic violence is directed at a particular victim, everyone suffers --children, families, friends and co-workers
- Our entire community suffers when domestic violence occurs

What Causes Domestic Violence?

- Domestic violence is caused by a need to have power and control over an intimate partner.
- Violence is a part of an effective strategy for creating and maintaining power and control.
- Domestic Violence is embedded in our social customs and institutions. Some men believe they are entitled to use physical or sexual violence.
- It is learned behavior:
 - Learned through observation
 - Learned through experience and reinforcement
 - Learned in culture
 - Learned in the family
 - Learned in communities: schools, peer groups, etc.

Domestic Violence is Not Caused By...

- Mental Illness -- Personality disorders, mental illness, poor impulse control, generational violence, communication deficits may compound the problem of domestic violence.
- Genetics
- Alcohol and drugs -- Perpetrators may blame their abuse on the effects of drugs and alcohol and many battered women may believe that drugs and alcohol cause the abuse. The fact is that the majority of the time, abuse occurs at other times when the perpetrator is not using drugs and alcohol. The two behaviors may be linked but they are two separate problems, which need separate interventions. The client may numb the pain of the abuse by using drugs and alcohol to the extent that she develops a dependency which makes it all the more difficult to leave the relationship.
- Out-of-control behavior
- Anger
- Stress
- Behavior of the victim or problems in the relationship -- Batterers strongly defend their violence by denying, minimizing, justifying, and rationalizing their behavior. *Battering involves choices by batterers.* It may appear to be a habitual reaction done without thought. But, think about what he destroys. He probably destroys only items, which mean something to her, not him.

Domestic Violence Definitions



- Battering – Assaulting behavior between adults in an intimate, sexual, theoretically peer, and usually cohabiting relationship.
- Four Forms of Battering:
 - Physical – Wide range of behaviors which include aggressive behavior done by the abuser to the victim’s body. For example: pushing, hitting, pulling hair, pinching, pounding, stabbing, spitting, choking, shooting, kicking, burning, clubbing
 - Sexual – Involves physical acts against the victim’s body. For example: unwanted pinching of breasts, buttocks, genitals; sexual activity accompanied by physical assaults; forced sexual activity; forcing sexual activity with a third person.
 - Psychological – No contact with victim’s body. Psychological weapons rather than physical attacks. Behaviors may include: threats of suicide, violence, deportation, custody; forcing victim to do degrading things; controlling victim’s activities, such as: sleep, eating habits, social relationships, access to money; constant attacks on victim’s self-esteem.
 - Destruction of Property or Pets -- No contact with victim's body, but assaults still meant towards victim. Destruction not random, not merely “venting.” Same impact on victim as physical abuse. For example: destroying objects during arguments; breaking victim’s favorite property; attacks on victim’s pets
- Similarities of Four Forms of Battering:
 - Done without concern for victim’s mental or physical well-being.
 - Done to show domination, to control the victim, to punish.
 - Reoccurring, often escalating in severity and frequency.